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AUTHOR Stier, William F., Jr.
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ABSTRACT

Studying the Olympics can be useful in educating elementary and secondary students to the roles women have played as athletic competitors, sports administrators, and in sports governance. Study of the Olympics can provide educational experiences which: (1) provide a picture of challenges at all levels of sport under which women have been forced to operate in the past; (2) indicate opportunities to eliminate biases against women; and (3) help in eliminating stereotypes. Contents of an educational program might include: exposure to the growth in the number of female athletic participants from 1896 (the birth of modern Olympics); examination of the roles which various national sports governing bodies have played in the advancement of women; study of the Olympic Charter in light of the absence of any sex discrimination clause; introduction to growth in the number of women in areas of governance; study of the differences in the treatment of women in different countries; and an awareness of what is currently being done to open doors of opportunity for women at the Olympic level. Several programs adaptable to elementary and secondary students, published under sponsorship of the U.S. Olympic Committee, are noted. (LL)

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Education, Women and the Olympics

A Speech Delivered at the National Convention of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance [AAHPERD], April 8, 1992.

by

Dr. William F. Stier, Jr.
Professor of Physical Education and Sport
Director of Sport Management - Undergraduate
Director of Athletic Administration - Graduate
State University of New York
Brockport, New York 14420

Session Sponsored by the National Association for Girls and Women in Sports

Thank you very much for that kind introduction. Much of what I am about to share with you this afternoon is a result of work which I was involved in during the summer of 1990 when I, along with four other Sport Scholars, were selected by the United States Olympic Committee to travel to Olympia, Greece to address the 1990 International Olympic Academy (IOA) in July of that year. The topic of the conference was Women, Education and the Olympics and much of our work centered on how the Olympics can play a role in the educational process of our young people throughout the world.

So many of my thoughts which I am going to share with you this afternoon have been tossed around and examined from a number of different vantage points or perspectives during the previous two years. I also want to direct you to a recent journal article I wrote titled "Women in the Olympic Movement: Advancing Women's Roles Through Education" which appeared in the

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November-December issue of the Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance. This 1991 article paints a backdrop for the challenges which women have faced in gaining partial acceptance and, hopefully in the future, full acceptance within the Olympic umbrella. The article also presents, from a historical approach, the achievements women have made in the Olympics in terms of both athletic competitive activities and in terms of the governance structure.

Now to the business at hand, education, women and the Olympics. As we all know, the Olympics are a very attractive and world wide mega-event. However, there is more to the Olympics than the mere competition of man against man, woman against woman, team against team, and nation against nation. I would like to speak directly to the topic of using the Olympic experience as an integral part of the educational processes which take place in our own elementary and secondary schools.

Historically speaking there have been two viewpoints when speaking of education and the Olympics. One position says that the study of the Olympics is a valuable experience in and of itself. That is, the study of the Olympics, past, present, and future, is beneficial (and some would say even essential) for any well educated, well rounded individual in our society. A second position is taken by those who view the study of the Olympics as important because such an examination can be a means to an end. That is, specifically, the process of studying the Olympics can help improve and enhance the basic skills usually taught in the classroom. These skills include, but are not limited to, skills associated with reading, language arts, math, social studies, science, reference skills, art, music, and physical education.

However, I believe that the study of the Olympics can be used in yet

another meaningful way. Namely, to educate our young men and women in terms of the roles which women have played and have not played as athletic competitors, as sport administrators and in the governance of sports - at all levels including the Federations, the USOC and the IOC. I am of the opinion that the study of the Olympics and the Olympic experience, from the perspective of our own country as well as from the perspective of other countries, can have a positive and profound effect upon our youngsters thereby helping them to have (1) a more accurate picture of the challenges in all levels of sport which women have been forced to operate under in the past, as well as presently; and (2) to be more receptive to being less bias and less prejudiced towards women in sport and women in general.

Thus, the study of the Olympics can be justified on the basis of **three perspectives**, i.e., (1) enhancing the development of basic skills, (2) having a value in and of itself, and (3) helping to understand sexual and gender challenges and inequality in the past, present and future dimensions. The educational experiences dealing with the subject of gender inequity should revolve around the examination of the roles and opportunities which women have had and will (or could) have as competitors, administrators and in the governance aspect of sport from the historical, social, political, financial and futuristic perspectives.

Through such an educational process it is my hope that equal <u>competitive</u> opportunities will emerge for women and that equal <u>administrative</u>, <u>managerial</u>, and <u>governance</u> opportunities will be created in terms of all levels of sport including the national sport governing bodies, the various international federations, individual national Olympic committees, and in the IOC itself.

It is essential that this educational experience involve both men and

women in terms of being students and teachers. Young women need role models to emulate in their own future involvements with sports in the competitive, administrative and governance arenas. Young men need role models who demonstrate non-biased and non-prejudicial attitudes and behaviors towards women in general and women in sport.

Hopefully, the educational process in this context will have a number of major objectives. One of these objectives is, from a historical position, to provide a better understanding of the status, challenges, needs and capabilities of women and women in sport. Naturally, this historical examination should take into account the realities of a number of different countries, including the USA, as well as what is happening on the international Olympic level as a whole.

Another objective is to help eliminate biases and prejudices. Males and females need to be sensitized to recognize the commonly held biases and prejudices (those openly displayed and those hidden) against women in general, women in sport, and women in the Olympics. A third objective is to help expose and eliminate stereotypes of females and males (both in and out of the sport arena) on behalf of both females and males. It is important to recognize that both women and men hold stereotypical beliefs regarding their own sex and the opposite sex.

Another goal of the educational process might be to help eliminate artificial barriers to full participation by women in sports - again in terms of athletic competition, sport administration and governance in sports, at all levels. And, hopefully, such educational experiences will highlight the need for women role models as competitors and as administrators in both educational institutions and in the athletic arena.

There should also be an exploration in terms of present and future

opportunities in terms of competitors and administrators and in governance areas at the local, state, national and international sport arenas. And, finally, through this educational process, associated with the Olympic movement, women will gain experiences and competencies which will help them in assuming rightful positions as athletes and sport administrators at all levels, including the elite level, the Olympic level.

For after all the end product of education is some type of action, some type of happening, some type of change for the better. Education has the potential to open the eyes of both boys and girls, men and women - our future citizens and leaders - thereby providing a motivation and encouragement for women to actively pursue involvement in sports at all levels. Hopefully, women's future involvement in sport will take place in an atmosphere less hostile and less belligerent to women than that which currently exits and certainly less than that which existed only a few short years ago.

The power of education can be immeasurable if used properly, effectively and efficiently. Education and the educational activities can serve as a catalyst to affirmatively prepare women for positions of involvement and leadership. Educational experiences can serve to prepare individuals and organizations in terms of greater acceptance of women in active and meaningful roles in athletic competition and governance. And, education can encourage others (men and women) to provide appropriate assistance (mentoring) to women in the competitive and governance arenas. Ultimately, education can play a major role in providing women with opportunities to be competent within the areas of sport governance and competition. Similarly, education can provide women with opportunities to be marketable (competency is not enough) within the world of sport (all levels) in terms of governance, administration, and competition.

To answer the question "what might comprise the content of the educational experience?" let me share these thoughts. **First,** the students should be exposed to the growth in the number of female athletic participants from 1896 (the birth of the modern Olympics) to the present time, not just in terms of the Olympics but in respect to all aspects of sport - both in this country and in other countries. **Second,** the role which the various national sport governing bodies in the USA, the USOC and the various Federations have played in the advancement (and/or hindrance) of women should be pursued. **Third,** the Olympic Charter should be studied in detail in light of the absence of any sex discrimination clause - thereby permitting sex discrimination by not specifically speaking out against same. **Fourth,** students should be introduced to the growth (it being what it is) in the number of women in the area of governance within the USOC, the IOC, and within various sport Federations.

Fifth, students should study the differences in the treatment of women in different countries and the reasons for the difference. Included in this effort should be an examination of appropriate laws and regulations relating to gender inequity and sexual discrimination. **Sixth,** students should be made aware of what is currently being done to open doors of opportunity for women at the level of Olympics, the Federations and at the national, state, and local levels (including high schools and colleges).

Educational experiences can take place both inside the formal educational facilities and outside of the schools. The formal confines of an educational institution can indeed provide formal exposure of the need for gender equity to our young people, both male and female. However, the informal experience in the real world of sport (out there on the firing line), i.e., on the fields or courts themselves will prove equally effective

if women and girls are given the opportunity to experience gender equity and if men and boys are also given the opportunity to see the realities of gender equity in sports.

At this point in my discussion I want to point out some very excellent educational programs published under the sponsorship of the USOC. The first of these that I am going to mention was prepared for the 1988 Olympic Games in cooperation with McDonald's Corporation and the USOC Educational Council. It is still timely and can be quite helpful for teachers and coaches and young people. Although originally designed for grades 4-8, many of the suggestions could be adapted for high school level as well. The program is called VISIONS OF GLORY - OLYMPIC EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM.

This educational program was designed to accompany and enhance the regular subjects taught in the classroom. The educational program promotes the theme of team spirit, team work and goal awareness. Provided within the packet is both a teacher's guide and a booklet of various student activity sheets. Both are most helpful. The suggested activities in the booklet help teach students ABOUT the Olympics. This program serves as a valuable lesson by providing opportunities for the students to explore the following four qualities of (1) commitment, (2) sacrifice, (3) perseverance, and (4) belief in one's dreams. All can be explored in light of the challenges and opportunities and limitations facing females and males.

All of the learning activities are designed to reinforce one or more of the following basic skills which are normally taught daily in the classroom.

(A) reading

(B) language arts

(C) math

(D) social studies

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(E) science

(F) reference skills

(G) art

(H) music

(I) physical education

This educational program has ten specific objectives for the elementary students. These objectives include helping the students:

A. practice their basic skills taught in the regular classroom through curriculum based on the Olympics

B. study the history of the Olympics - and here I am proposing that we include deliberate mention of women and men

C. acquire knowledge about famous Olympians - women and men

D. practice and refine research skills while learning about the origins, scoring methods, skills needed and equipment used in Olympic sporting events

E. explore countries which hosted past Olympic Games - how these countries differ in their treatment of women and men generally and, specifically, how such treatment affects sport in each country

F. gain deeper understanding of the different cultures and environment of Olympic participants

G. learn about rules and regulations of Olympics

H. Learn about the purpose(s) of the USOC

I. learn about physical fitness and nutrition

J. gain respect for commitment to excellence and the need for sacrifice

A second educational publication provided by the USOC Education Committee is a booklet called the OLYMPIC DAY IN THE SCHOOLS - Focus on Excellence. This is another excellent resource for the classroom teacher who

does not have the time, the inclination or the resources to do the necessary background research for it provides a wealth of material readily utilized by the average teacher - regardless of one's previously level of familiarity of the Olympics.

Specifically, the publication provides a brief history and summary of the Olympics and Olympism. The purpose and structure of the USOC are explained in detail. Lists of resources are included for a wide range of activities including an updated bibliography. An Olympic Primer is also presented which covers the international Olympic committee, the USOC, and the Olympic games, both ancient and modern. Even a listing of the various US sports federations is included.

The purpose of this booklet is to help teachers organize an actual Olympic day in the schools program. The 3-ring booklet lists literally hundreds of meaningful suggestions, ideas, etc. The individual teacher's early planning efforts can be greatly simplified by merely following the guidelines presented in this booklet. Suggestions are provided in terms of implementing committees, examples of classroom activities in physical education, language arts, science, mathematics, social studies, art/industrial arts, music, dance, drama, and health. Even sample letters to parents are included.

In summary, let me encourage you to use the upcoming Olympics as "teachable moments" or "incidental teaching opportunities" in order to (1) reenforce and to enhance (1) the teaching of basic skills, (2) enhance appreciation of competitive sport participation for its own sake, (3) deepen the understanding of the challenges women have faced in attempting to gain access to equal athletic competition, sport administration, and sports governance, and (4) expand the openness to the acceptance of women on an

equal basis in sport and in the society at large.

For further information regarding the educational programs or booklets published by the United States Olympic Committee and the USOC Education Committee I suggest you write to:

U.S. Olympic Committee
Department of Education Services
1750 East Boulder Street
Colorado Springs, CO 80909

Thank you.

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